



United Lincolnshire Hospitals **NHS**  
NHS Trust

## Gastroenteritis in children

Advice for parents

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Lincoln County Hospital

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[www.ulh.nhs.uk](http://www.ulh.nhs.uk)

If you require this information in other languages, large print or audio (CD or tape) format please ask either the medical staff, contact the main switchboard number who will put you through to the Patient & Public Involvement Team or email [patient.involvement@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.involvement@ulh.nhs.uk)

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## What is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is the medical name for “tummy bug.” It is an infection of the stomach and bowel. It is sometimes called diarrhoea and vomiting or D&V.

## How is it caught?

The illness is usually caught from another person (who may themselves be well) or may be picked up from infected food.

## What is it caused by?

Gastroenteritis infection can be caused by several different germs. **The commonest cause is a virus germ called Rotavirus but it may be caused by a bacterial germ such as Salmonella, the germ which causes food poisoning, or Shigella, the germ which causes dysentery** There are also several other germs which cause Gastroenteritis. Some germs also cause a runny nose and cough as well as the Gastroenteritis.





## When to call your doctor

- If the child has no energy and is tired. In the case of a baby, when he/she is sleeping more than usual and not eager for feeds.
- If the child has sunken eyes or in the case of a baby, a sunken, soft spot on the head (fontanelle).
- If the child or baby is passing much less urine than usual.
- If the child or baby has a high fever.
- If the child or baby continues to vomit a lot despite small frequent feeds.
- If the diarrhoea does not start to improve in a few days.
- If you are worried.

**This information booklet is meant for parents/carers to understand about gastroenteritis and its treatment.**



## What makes the child with Gastroenteritis ill?

In Gastroenteritis the germ causes irritation of the stomach lining, which may make the child vomit and cause irritation of the bowel lining. The bowel lining produces extra liquid which forms the diarrhoea. It is the loss of liquid from the body which can make the child ill, through dehydration, rather than the germ itself, in most cases.

## How long will Gastroenteritis last?

In most cases the worst is over in 4 or 5 days but the bowel motions often go back to normal quite slowly so that the child may have rather frequent, soft bowel motions for up to 2 weeks. If your child has diarrhoea for longer than this you should see your doctor again.

**Some children may have blood in their diarrhoea. You should always tell the doctor about this,** but it sometimes just means that there is a particular type of germ causing the Gastroenteritis.

## Stopping the germ spreading to other people

**It is very important to wash your hands carefully** after changing the nappy of a baby with Gastroenteritis and to dispose of the nappy safely. Children should wash their hands after they have been to the toilet.



## What about a medicine?

**There is no medicine that will safely stop diarrhoea in children.** The treatment of Gastroenteritis is to let the body heal itself while making sure that the child does not get dehydrated.

## Treatment

The treatment of Gastroenteritis is to replace the liquid lost through vomiting and diarrhoea and to allow the bowel to heal itself. **Antibiotics, to kill the germs, are not used because they can make the illness last longer and become more severe. Medicines (such as Kaolin or Lomotil) to stop the diarrhoea are not good for children as they can cause side effects.** It is also better that the diarrhoea comes out of the body, flushing the germs with it, rather than remaining inside.

**The best drink to replace the loss of fluid is a specially balanced mixture of salts and glucose.** A sachet of the glucose/salts powder is made into a drink with water following the instructions on the sachet. Examples of brand names are Dioralyte, Dextrolyte and Rehydrate. One of these may be prescribed by the doctor and they can be bought at chemists. For older children, ordinary drinks such as diluted Ribena or Vimto will be all right if they will not take the mixture.



## How much liquid should I give my child?

Babies should take at least the amount of fluid they would normally take each day and in addition some extra fluid, depending on how much diarrhoea they have had. They may need up to half as much fluid again. Children should be offered frequent drinks. The doctor or nurse will advise you about how much fluid your child needs.

**You can tell if your child is having enough to drink by the amount of urine he/she passes.** Urine is liquid the body does not need so that a good urine volume shows that a child has enough to drink and is getting rid of extra fluid.

## When should I re-start feeds and diet?

**24 hours is the maximum time for babies and children to be without milk or food.** Children who have diarrhoea only and no vomiting may not need to stop milk or food but just have extra drinks. **After 24 hours on the Dioralyte or other clear liquid, re-start full strength milk feeds for babies and a light diet such as yoghurt, milk to drink, cereals or toast for children.** The diarrhoea may get worse when baby milk or food is given to the child. This is natural because the bowel is still overactive and not digesting everything. However, it is better for the child to digest some food than to have nothing for days. Extra drinks of juice or Dioralyte should still be given as long as the diarrhoea lasts.